

I.N.I.

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
August 4, 2019
Exodus 20:15

In Christ Jesus, Who has told us that it is more blessed to give than to receive, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” A mighty big requirement as we have seen so far in our Ten Commandment study. God demands of us perfect love to Him and also to our neighbor. This means self-sacrifice, self-denial, selflessness.

We have now progressed to the 7th commandment of our God and the fourth in this Second Table of the Law—love toward our neighbor. It is good for us to stop here for a moment before we proceed and see how these commandments have been progressing. As we said the first three commandments are in regard to our relationship with God—in our worship and our love for Him and His Word.

The next seven are in regard to our fellow human beings. But there is a logical procession in these commandments. In the Fourth Commandment the Lord speaks of our parents; His representatives—those who stand over us in His place here on earth. Without these representatives there would be no family unit, there would be no government, no church, no safety, no security, no protection, no law and order, no consistent preaching of the Word and dispensing of the Sacraments. Without the family there would be no father and mother to spiritually raise their children by bringing them the Good News of Jesus Christ.

In the Fifth Commandment the Lord protects our most important earthly possession—our life. He protects our bodies and the time of grace He has given everyone by His command to not murder.

In the Sixth Commandment the Lord protects His institution of Marriage. He lays down the law against adultery and against every form of fornication.

And now in the Seventh Commandment the Lord protects our goods—our earthly, physical possessions that we are to use to serve the Lord, to serve our neighbor and to help provide for our family and ourselves.

Did I say “**our** earthly possessions?” Well, yes, I did. But in order to really understand this Seventh Commandment in a proper way we must first realize that all of our goods and that all of our possessions are not really **ours**. That is, not really ours to do with the way we want, the way we please.

Well if they aren't ours, then whose are they? That question is answered in the following passages: **EVERY GOOD GIFT AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, AND COMES DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS,... THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S, AND EVERYTHING IN IT, THE WORLD, AND ALL WHO LIVE IN IT;... AND HE (Job) SAID: "NAKED I CAME FROM MY MOTHER'S WOMB, AND NAKED SHALL I RETURN THERE. THE LORD GAVE, AND THE LORD HAS TAKEN AWAY; BLESSED BE THE NAME OF THE LORD."... ' THE SILVER IS MINE, AND THE GOLD IS MINE,' SAYS THE LORD OF HOSTS... OR DO YOU NOT KNOW THAT YOUR BODY IS THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT *WHO IS* IN YOU, WHOM YOU HAVE FROM GOD, AND YOU ARE NOT YOUR OWN? FOR YOU WERE BOUGHT AT A PRICE; THEREFORE GLORIFY GOD IN YOUR BODY AND IN YOUR SPIRIT, WHICH ARE GOD'S.**

What do these passages teach us? **God owns everything!** Every little and big thing in this world, yes, even the whole universe is His, He created it. But the Lord in His ever gracious and merciful love gives us of His gifts and blessings abundantly. These gifts and blessings are what we call our possessions—our homes, our clothes, food, furniture, cars, property, toys, electronics, our bodies, our talents and abilities, our intellect; everything comes from God.

These are given to us for a purpose. We are put in charge of these things for a reason. In 1 Peter 4:10 we are told the reason: **EACH ONE SHOULD USE WHATEVER GIFT HE HAS RECEIVED TO SERVE OTHERS, FAITHFULLY ADMINISTERING GOD'S GRACE IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS.**

That is why God has blessed us with His gifts—so that we in turn would bestow them upon others—our families, sons/daughters, father/mother, sister/brother, relatives/friends, strangers and especially the poor and needy.

The Lord says that we are stewards or managers of His gifts. A steward or manager is one who takes care of the financial or physical affairs of someone else—it is one who has been put in charge of a matter. Therefore we are not owners; we are stewards who have been put in charge of God's creation; His world; His gifts; His silver and gold. Since we are stewards in charge of God's gifts we should never take away from someone else these gifts God has bestowed upon them.

So we see, as our sermon theme indicates, that the Seventh Commandment, "You shall not steal" is all about 1) stealing and 2) stewardship.

Had sin not come into this world, we would all use God's gifts to us to sustain ourselves and to share with others. But sin changed love into greed and sharing into selfishness. However there is more to this commandment than just taking something away from someone else; i.e. through robbery, mugging, breaking into a home, picking a pocket, or shoplifting. These things are condemned in this commandment. But there is far more.

We should not try to get our neighbor's goods by dishonest dealing—fraud; by overcharging or charging excessive interest; by embezzlement; by cheating on our taxes; by forgery; by extortion; by poaching; blackmail; larceny; even gambling. The Lord says in Lev. ' **YOU SHALL NOT CHEAT YOUR NEIGHBOR, NOR ROB HIM.** If we truly loved our neighbor as ourselves, we would never want to do any of these shameful things to him to take away and get what he has.

Yet we see these things happening all of the time. Gambling, going to the casinos and playing the lottery--trying to take away from our neighbor what is his, or not being content with what we have and wanting more: being lazy at work—stealing from our employers by not working as hard as we should; intentionally defaulting on loan payments; allowing greed to build up in our hearts so that we are not content and happy with our lives but are envious and jealous of others who have more than us; not sharing with our brothers and sisters the toys and furnishings we have been given but selfishly keeping them to ourselves; being jealous and unhappy when we see other fellow workers getting promotions and raises. Instead of having our neighbor's welfare in mind at all times we see ourselves putting our own welfare first.

These commandments are harsh and hard on us. They strike to the very heart of every one of us and so they should. It is awfully hard not to begrudge someone else their good fortune; their blessings and possessions. Rather we so often compare what we have to what others have and become jealous. God says we should be happy when our neighbors, friends, siblings, classmates, fellow workers, congregation members receive blessings and not be covetous of them.

By nature every one of us is essentially and basically self-oriented, greedy and selfish. We don't have to teach our children to take, we have to teach them to share and to give to others? One of the first words our children learn is "mine!" This tendency in the youngest of us is no different in the rest of us. To always think of others first, myself last is not only hard, it is downright impossible at times because of our sinful flesh.

That is where Christ again is needed. Our selfless Savior was the perfect steward of God's gifts. He always had mankind's needs and welfare in mind. He kept this commandment for us with perfect love for His neighbor at all times. He never was greedy for anything. He never wanted first and most and more than others. Though He was rich, being the very Son of God with all the power and might, with all the riches of the world at His disposal, yet for our sakes He became poor---poor in His humanity, forsaking His Godly powers—poor in this life; having little food and clothing and no house to call His own; poor in the fact that He went to the cross to be sacrificed for us to pay for the guilt and punishment of our sins against this and all the commandments. And because of His poverty we have become rich, rich with the spiritual blessings of forgiveness, everlasting life and salvation; rich with the assurance of eternal glory in the heavenly mansions above.

So now we look at the positive side of this Seventh Commandment and see that we will want to help to improve and protect our neighbor's property and way of making a living. With Christ living in our hearts we will want to spend our lives in giving rather than receiving in being good stewards of God's gracious gifts. We will glorify God with our bodies and souls. We will make the best use of our time and talents in service to others and to our God. We will use the monetary blessings that God has so richly showered upon us for our families needs, for the poor and needy, for the paying of our taxes and especially for the spreading of God's Word and the welfare of His church here on earth.

When we are filled with Christ's love for us we will know what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote **LOVE IS PATIENT, LOVE IS KIND. IT DOES NOT ENVY, IT DOES NOT BOAST, IT IS NOT PROUD. IT IS NOT RUDE, IT IS NOT SELF-SEEKING, IT IS NOT EASILY ANGERED,**

IT KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS. LOVE DOES NOT DELIGHT IN EVIL BUT REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH. With Christ's love in us our concern shifts from getting to giving; from stealing to sharing; from hurting to helping.

As the hymnist writes: *"In sickness, sorrow, want or care, Whate'er it be, 'tis ours to share; May we, where help is needed there Give help as unto Thee.*

We began this morning's sermon by saying that Jesus said it is more blessed to give than to receive. It is hard for us to reconcile ourselves to that fact. If we were truly content with what we have, with the gifts and goods the Lord has already provided for us knowing that He has given us all that we need spiritually for eternal life and happiness through Christ and that He has promised He will always be there to provide for us and see us through in our time of need, then we would not want to get but rather we would be moved to give. The Lord promises: **LET YOUR CONDUCT BE WITHOUT COVETOUSNESS; BE CONTENT WITH SUCH THINGS AS YOU HAVE. FOR HE HIMSELF HAS SAID, "I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU."... NOW GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT IS GREAT GAIN. FOR WE BROUGHT NOTHING INTO THIS WORLD, AND IT IS CERTAIN WE CAN CARRY NOTHING OUT. AND HAVING FOOD AND CLOTHING, WITH THESE WE SHALL BE CONTENT.**

All of us are wealthier and more richly blessed than any billionaire on this earth. We have the eternal blessings of life and salvation, riches that can never perish, spoil, rust or fade, riches that will never diminish in value; riches that cannot be stolen away from us for they are stored in heaven for us and will be permanently given to us in all their glory on that last great day.

Therefore in this life let us be content with the many physical, earthly gifts that our God gives to us to use in our lifetime. Let us be good stewards of these many blessings using them for our families, our friends, relatives, strangers, the poor, even our enemies. And above all let us use them for Jesus in the spreading of His Word. This can only be accomplished because of Jesus' great love for us. The Apostle Paul tells us: **FOR THE LOVE OF CHRIST COMPELS US, BECAUSE WE JUDGE THUS: THAT IF ONE DIED FOR ALL, THEN ALL DIED; AND HE DIED FOR ALL, THAT THOSE WHO LIVE SHOULD LIVE NO LONGER FOR THEMSELVES, BUT FOR HIM WHO DIED FOR THEM AND ROSE AGAIN.**

Amen.